

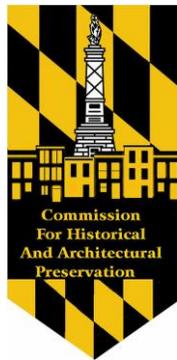
**Baltimore City  
Commission for Historical and  
Architectural Preservation**

**Landmark Designation Report  
August 11, 2015**



**American Legion Federal Post No. 19**

1502 Madison Avenue  
Baltimore, Maryland



COMMISSION FOR HISTORICAL & ARCHITECTURAL PRESERVATION

ERIC HOLCOMB, *Executive Director*

Charles L. Benton, Jr. Building 417 East Fayette Street Eighth Floor Baltimore, MD 21202-3416  
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## Significance Summary

Established in 1930 during the Great Depression, American Legion Federal Post No. 19 is one of the oldest black American Legion posts in Maryland. It has had a very active membership serving their West Baltimore community for decades. Even during the Jim Crow-era, members served in leadership roles in the larger American Legion structure at the state and national level, fighting for equal opportunities for African American veterans both in the organization and in society at large. The Post was also home to the famed Blue Helmet Drum and Bugle Corps. Federal Post No. 19 has served as an important place for Baltimore's African American community for eighty-five years.

## History

At the end of World War I in 1919, the United States Congress chartered the American Legion as an organization focused on providing services to returning soldiers.<sup>1</sup> It quickly became a powerful veterans advocacy organization. Although the American Legion Constitution banned discrimination in its ranks, it was a segregated organization at its founding – following the “separate but equal” doctrine common in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. African American veterans were barred from joining their fellow white veterans in the American Legion, and so they formed their own American Legion posts.<sup>2</sup>

Black soldiers who fought for democracy in Europe had been hopeful that they would be rewarded with greater civil rights once they returned to the U.S. after the war.<sup>3</sup> W.E.B. DuBois expressed this in the May 1919 Crisis editorial "Returning Soldiers," declaring, “But by the God of Heaven, we are cowards and jackasses if now that that war is over, we do not marshal every ounce of our brain and brawn to fight a sterner, longer, more unbending battle against the forces of hell in our own land. *We return. We return from fighting. We return fighting. Make way for Democracy! We saved it in France, and by the Great Jehovah, we will save it in the United States of America, or know the reason why.*”<sup>4</sup> Unfortunately, the returning black soldiers did have to fight for civil rights upon their return, and one way they did that was through the establishment of their own American Legion Posts.

The Walter Green Post No. 14, a black American Legion Post, was established in Baltimore immediately following the end of World War I and is one of the oldest American Legion posts in the state of Maryland.<sup>5</sup> Federal Post No. 19 was established in March 1930 by members of the Walter Green Post No. 14 who were war veterans that were also federal employees.<sup>6</sup> Federal Post No. 19 were granted a temporary charter by the National Headquarters, which became permanent in 1937.<sup>7</sup> Based on available records, Federal Post No. 19 is arguably the second-oldest black American Legion post in the State. When Federal Post No. 19 was founded, membership was limited to members of the federal government, most of whom were postal workers.<sup>8</sup> Bernard L. Heiner was the founder of the Federal Post, and Emory Cole was the first commander.<sup>9</sup>

These were the charter members of the Post:

Robert W. Collier	Bernard L. Hiner
Joseph A. Mack	Frank E. Mack
Charles H. Green	Joseph W. Woolford
Oliver Brown	Charles E. Thomas
William R. Chew	Fred K. Pate
Thomas R. Marshall	Ringgold Dorsey
William Oliver Prout	Emory R. Cole <sup>10</sup>
John W. Roberts	

The Post helped form and charter the Ladies' Auxiliary Unit No. 19 in 1935 and the Sons of the Legion Squadron #19 in January 1937.<sup>11</sup>

The members of the Federal Post were active in their local Post, but were also very active in the larger American Legion structure. Members of the Federal Post No. 19 were elected to leadership roles at the state and federal levels of the American Legion. While the American Legion was integrated, it did not offer equal opportunities to African Americans, so it is even more impressive that these members were elected by the general majority-white membership. In 1935, Clarence Tydings was elected to serve as one of eleven State delegates to the National American Legion Convention. In 1940, Percy S. Smith was elected State vice-commander-at-large.<sup>12</sup> In 1944, John Stewart, commander of Federal Post No. 19, was elected to the State executive committee of the American Legion.<sup>13</sup> They were involved in state and national conferences of the American Legion, and helped vote for important resolutions, such as the 1934 Federal Anti-lynching bill, and the 1935 Federal American Legion resolution disapproving the discrimination practiced against “colored ex-service men by white posts in several southern states”.<sup>14</sup>

Federal Post No. 19 was actively involved in community service. In 1932, during the Great Depression, it led a campaign to assist unemployed veterans by helping them find jobs.<sup>15</sup> In 1951, the Post was awarded the Joseph A. O’Grady Memorial Trophy at Maryland’s annual convention for the assistance that they provided to Provident Hospital, assisting in the *Afro-American’s* Clean Block Campaign, and other service.<sup>16</sup> Members of Federal Post No. 19 also participated in state-wide American Legion membership drives.<sup>17</sup>

The Federal Post fought discrimination in the American Legion and in Baltimore City. In 1941, 30 members and friends of Federal Post No. 19 attended the Annual State Legionnaire banquet at the Emerson Hotel, to which they were invited by the American Legion. Following the dinner, one of the couples was denied permission to dance, per hotel policy against “dancing by colored couples”. The white State Commander George Harmon did not push against the hotel policy, nor apologize to the members of Federal Post No. 19.<sup>18</sup> Federal Post Commander Edward V. Clarke stated “If the Emerson Hotel is larger than the American Legion, then to h--- with the Legion.”<sup>19</sup> Commander Clarke filed a complaint to the National Commander of the American Legion for the “rank discrimination” shown to the members of Federal Post No. 19, citing the American

Legion Constitution, on which “discrimination on account of race, creed or color is supposed to be an unknown quantity.”<sup>20</sup>

In 1932, the Blue Helmet Drum and Bugle Corps was organized by efforts of both the Federal Post No. 19 and Walter Green Post No. 14.<sup>21</sup> This was the first black American Legion drum and bugle corps in the state. William Brady served as drum major.<sup>22</sup> Brass marching bands played a significant role in African American culture in the early 20th century. As stated by William Pleasant “They were usually the only organized social vehicles that permitted the full participation of Black artists as both performers and as leader/composers.”<sup>23</sup>

The Blue Helmet Drum and Bugle Corps was embraced by the City government as an excellent ambassador of the City. Over several years, the Corps received funding from the city to partially finance their attendance at annual nation American Legion conventions.<sup>24</sup> The Blue Helmet Corps won a number of awards at state and national levels and participated in countless conventions, parades, and competitions.<sup>25</sup> The Blue Helmet Drum and Bugle Corps was a tremendous source of pride for the neighborhood.<sup>26</sup>

In its early years, the members of the Federal Post did not have a clubhouse, instead meeting in the homes of its members, or community spaces such as the YMCA on Druid Hill Avenue, the New York Hotel on Madison Avenue, or the upper floor of the Ubangi Club on Pennsylvania Avenue, which was nicknamed “The Loft”.<sup>27</sup> According to the Federal Post historians, after meetings at “The Loft,” “the members often entertained their guests with pots and pans of food from home and pitchers and buckets of beer from downstairs.”<sup>28</sup> The Post was later located in the 700 block of Preston Street, which was demolished for the construction of McCullough Homes. The Post then held meetings at other locations, including Metropolitan Church on Carrolton and Lanvale Streets, and Macedonia Baptist Church on Lafayette and Fremont Avenue and eventually at Elks Monumental Lodge #3 on Madison Avenue. By the early 1940s, the Post was renting the first and second floors of their present building, 1502 Madison Street.<sup>29</sup> On January 10, 1945, John D. Stewart and Horatio Matthews, members of the Federal Post, purchased the building and got a mortgage.<sup>30</sup> On December 20, 1945, the two men sold the building to Federal Post #19 American Legion Inc.<sup>31</sup> This is still their home today.

The historians of Federal Post No. 19 provide a robust social history of the Post, which is included here:

[Following the end of World War II] they opened their doors to a large contingent of World War II veterans, and membership rose to more than three hundred members. The comrades held numerous successful social events including cabarets, suppers, and programs that attracted veterans from across Baltimore and Posts from out of town.

During the 40's and 50's, past Post #19 commanders, such as Alfred Jones and H.H. Matthews, continued to stress community

involvement and youth. In addition to forming the Sons of the Legion Squadron #19, in the mid-40's, comrades at Post #19 organized the first black Sea Scout, an organization similar to the Boys' Scouts, in the state. They also sponsored young men to summer camps in Virginia. In the mid-50's, comrades participated in community projects such as the *Afro-American* newspaper's Clean Block Program and helped to form the Thompson-Miller V.F.W. Post #9527s, which was chartered at Federal Post #19.

The 50's and early 60's were the heydays for the Blue Helmet Corps, and bolstered by veterans of the Korean War, Post #19 continued to thrive. On any given weekend during the summers, bus loads of people from out of town and across town descended upon Madison Avenue to participate in various parades and events. The neighborhood children followed their favorite groups along the parade route, and parents observed the goings on perched in their windows. Post #19 provided a patriotic environment where the spirit of community and pride in being American and black could nurture and grow.

During the early 1960's, the Blue Helmet Corps became the first black drum and bugle corps to perform at the Apple Blossom Festival in Winchester, Virginia, breaking years of segregation and discrimination at the Festival. While several observers maintained that they were the best group in the parade, nevertheless, the members of the Corps were extremely proud of the second place trophy they had won. For a part of its history, the Blue Helmet Corps served as the only senior American Legion drum and bugle corps in the state of Maryland. The Department of Maryland sent the Blue Helmet Corps to various conventions to represent the state. South of Maryland and in many places in Maryland, they often faced discrimination and the forces of Jim Crow segregation. Yet, they continued to proudly carry the banner of the American Legion for their state and country.

In 1974, after four decades of community, state, and national service, the Blue Helmet Corps disbanded, crippled by a fire that destroyed much of Post #19's records, as well as other information. Although the post was rebuilt and remodeled, the Corps never rebounded. Still, the legacy of the Blue Helmet Corps lives on in the tradition of the present Color Guard, which has an equally impressive record of service, and in the hearts and souls of all the comrades.

The 1974 fire blazed through the building and destroyed floors, ceilings, and walls. Unfortunately, many valuable, irreplaceable

records, pictures, awards, and memorabilia to the past were also lost. The damage totaled more than \$20,000 and required complete renovation of most of the building. Comrades had to replace the staircases, remodel and drop the ceiling, install new paneling and flooring, and repair all the plumbing and electrical wiring. Through it all, the Post #19 family pulled together to overcome the crisis.

During the 1970's, 80's, and 90's, the comrades of Federal Post #19 were joined by veterans of the Vietnam War, who contributed to the success and mission to serve veterans and their families and the community. In the mid-1990's, the comrades faced a series of crises that included the wind and rain ripping parts of the roof from the building and the floor collapsing in the back, which called for new rounds of fundraising and renovations. Again, the Post #19 family overcame adversity.

Today, veterans from the 1st and 2nd Iraq Wars and the Afghan War are joining and contributing to the effort, and the comrades of Post #19 continue to stress community and youth. Each year, the Post #19 family sponsors a Back-to-School Block Party for children in the neighborhood. Supported through a joint effort with the Auxiliary and Sons, the children receive book bags and supplies for school. Several community and health services organizations also set up booths for the event. The comrades also give toys for the neighborhood at an annual Christmas Party and Thanksgiving dinner for senior citizens and veterans and their families. The comrades also support the students of the Freestate Challenge Academy and Jr. ROTC, who lend a hand at several of our events, along with community groups like the James Mosher Baseball League.

Of course, throughout our 80 year history, the comrades of Post #19 have been supported by families and friends. In many ways beyond the comrades, the strength of Post #19 has been in its partnership with Auxiliary Unit #19 and SAL Squadron #19, and no history of Post #19 can exist without acknowledging and thanking their efforts throughout the years. Working together, the Post #19 family is poised for the future and is "Striving for a Greater Purpose."<sup>32</sup>

## **Architectural Description**

The property is a late 19<sup>th</sup> century 3-bay brick Italianate rowhouse. It features a decorative pressed tin frieze and Italianate cornice, and some decorative egg and dart molded brick window and door surrounds. At one point, the façade was likely fully

covered with formstone, though today, there are only a few traces of this formstone left on the door surround of the main entrance and the base of the building. The property is listed on the National Register as a contributing property to the Old West Baltimore National Historic District. It is also a contributing property to the local Upton's Marble Hill Historic District.

## **Staff Recommendations**

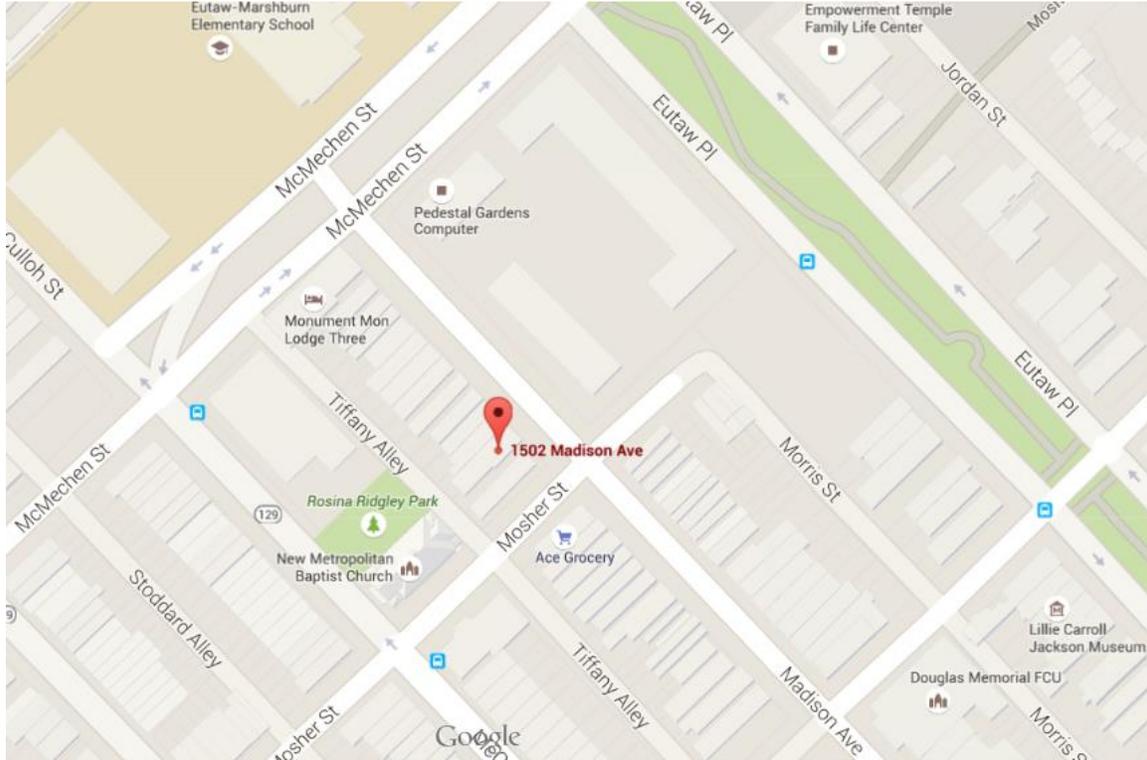
The property meets CHAP Landmark Designation Standards:

B. A Baltimore City Landmark may be a site, structure, landscape, building (or portion thereof), place, work of art, or other object which:

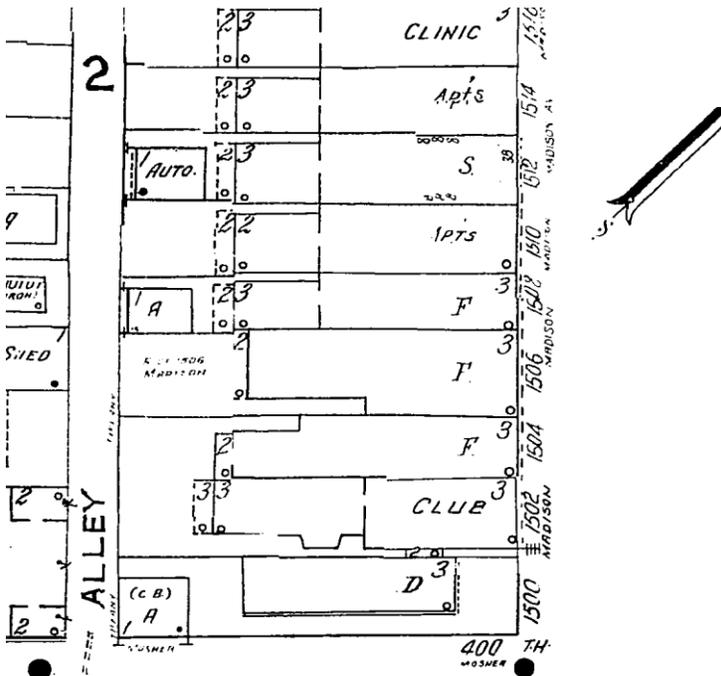
1. Is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of Baltimore history;

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## Locator Map



## Historic Map



1951 Sanborn Fire Insurance Map, depicting the building after it became the American Legion Post. (Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps 1914-1951, Vol. 2, Sheet 189)

## Current Photographs



The American Legion Post today.



Egg and dart molded brick window surround detail.

<sup>1</sup> “History” The American Legion. <http://www.legion.org/history>

<sup>2</sup> “Post History” American Legion Federal Post No. 19. <http://federalpost19.org/index.php?id=2> Accessed 7/24/2015.

<sup>3</sup> Chad Williams “African Americans and World War I” in *Africana Age: African and African Diasporan Transformations in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century* <http://exhibitions.nypl.org/africanaage/essay-world-war-i.html>

<sup>4</sup> Chad Williams; W.E.B. Dubois “Returning Soldiers” May 1919, <http://teachingamericanhistory.org/library/document/returning-soldiers/>

<sup>5</sup> “AMERICAN LEGION IN SESSION HERE: Visitors from Out of Town ...”,

<sup>6</sup> “Fraternal Orders: F.A.A.M. Campaign Reaches \$4,000 Mark”, *Afro-American* (1893-1988); Mar 22, 1930; ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Baltimore Afro-American, pg. A17

<sup>7</sup> “Post History” American Legion Federal Post No. 19. <http://federalpost19.org/index.php?id=2> Accessed 7/24/2015.

<sup>8</sup> “AMERICAN LEGION IN SESSION HERE: Visitors from Out of Town ...”, *Afro-American* (1893-1988); Aug 30, 1930; ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Baltimore Afro-American, pg. A2; “Fraternal Orders: F.A.A.M. Campaign Reaches \$4,000 Mark”

<sup>9</sup> “Negro Posts Of Legion Will Dedicate Colors: More Than 1,000 Will Take ...” *The Sun* (1837-1989); Oct 4, 1936; ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Baltimore Sun, pg. 3; “Fraternal Orders: F.A.A.M. Campaign Reaches \$4,000 Mark”

<sup>10</sup> “Application for Post of the American Legion” On File with Federal Post No. 19

<sup>11</sup> “Post History”

<sup>12</sup> “Legion Elects Percy S.Smith to State Office”, *Afro-American* (1893-1988); Sep 7, 1940; ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Baltimore Afro-American, pg. 11

<sup>13</sup> “2 Elected to State Posts at American Legion Meet”, *Afro-American* (1893-1988); Aug 19, 1944; ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Baltimore Afro-American, pg. 15

<sup>14</sup> “Moton Daughter Preferred Not to Teash at Tuskegee” *Afro-American* (1893-1988); Sep 15, 1934;

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ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Baltimore Afro-American, pg. 3; "840 Vets, Many Mixed Posts at Legion Meeting: Jersey Delegation Asks ..." Afro-American (1893-1988); Oct 5, 1935; ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Baltimore Afro-American, pg. 11

<sup>15</sup> "Legion Post to Aid Unemployed", Afro-American (1893-1988); Mar 26, 1932; ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Baltimore Afro-American, pg. 17

<sup>16</sup> "LEGION NAMES WOLFSON NEW HEAD IN STATE: Elections Climax 33d Annual Convention Of Group In City", The Sun (1837-1989); Aug 26, 1951; ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Baltimore Sun pg. 26

<sup>17</sup> "AMERICAN LEGION IN MEMBERSHIP DRIVE" Afro-American (1893-1988); Mar 21, 1931; ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Baltimore Afro-American, pg. 3

<sup>18</sup> "Bar Diners from Hotel Dance" Afro-American (1893-1988); Feb 15, 1941; ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Baltimore Afro-American

pg. 8; "National Legion Head to Hear of Insult in Hotel: State Commander Offers No Apology to Federal Post", Afro-American (1893-1988); Feb 22, 1941; ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Baltimore Afro-American, pg. 15

<sup>19</sup> "Bar Diners from Hotel Dance"

<sup>20</sup> "National Legion Head to Hear of Insult in Hotel: State Commander Offers No Apology to Federal Post Afro-American (1893-1988)"

<sup>21</sup> "Pastors of Baptist Churches Wed at Brilliant Ceremony: The Rev. Miss ..." Afro-American (1893-1988); Nov 12, 1932; ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Baltimore Afro-American, pg. 11; "LEGION GIRDS FOR DRIVE AND DRUM CORPS", Afro-American (1893-1988); Nov 5, 1932; ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Baltimore Afro-American, pg. 16

<sup>22</sup> "Fifth Avenue Blinks As Legion Boys March: 3,500 Colored World War Veterans in 3-Mile March" Afro-American (1893-1988); Oct 2, 1937; ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Baltimore Afro-American pg. 20

<sup>23</sup> William Pleasant "And the bands played on" [http://archsocialclub.com/?page\\_id=2402](http://archsocialclub.com/?page_id=2402)

<sup>24</sup> "\$4,385 In City Funds Given Legion Units Going To Convention", The Sun (1837-1989); Sep 14, 1938; ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Baltimore Sun, pg. 20

<sup>25</sup> "NAACP Drive Passes 2000 Mark;to be Extended: NAACP Campaign Jumps to ..." Afro-American (1893-1988); Oct 19, 1935; ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Baltimore Afro-American, pg. 15; "PARADE OPENS MARKET'S FETE BEFORE THRONG: 23 Bands, 5th Regiment ..." The Sun (1837-1989); Sep 12, 1936; ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Baltimore Sun, pg. 20; "MOTION BY LEGION HITS AT COMMUNISM: Resolution Pledges State Veterans ..." A Staff Correspondent The Sun (1837-1989); Aug 7, 1937; ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Baltimore Sun, pg. 5; "Fifth Avenue Blinks As Legion Boys March: 3,500 Colored World War Veterans in 3-Mile March", Afro-American (1893-1988); Oct 2, 1937; ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Baltimore Afro-American pg. 20; "Catholic Men Celebrate Feast of Christ, the King", Afro-American (1893-1988); Nov 6, 1937; ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Baltimore Afro-American, pg. 22; "Farewell Parly Planned For Legion Delegates" The Sun (1837-1989); Sep 13, 1938; ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Baltimore Sun pg. 24; "Legion Elects Percy S.Smith to State Office" Afro-American (1893-1988); Sep 7, 1940; ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Baltimore Afro-American, pg. 11; Mary Stratford, "Calls Legion parade DC's finest spectacle" Afro-American (1893-1988); Sep 11, 1954; ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Baltimore Afro-American, pg. 7

<sup>26</sup> "Post History"

<sup>27</sup> "Post History"

<sup>28</sup> "Post History"

<sup>29</sup> "Post History"

<sup>30</sup> January 10, 1945, Dorothy T. Shaver, Assignment to John D Stewart and Horatio Matthews. Liber MLP 6694, Folio 71-72. BALTIMORE CITY SUPERIOR COURT (Land Records); January 10, 1945, John D Stewart and Horatio Matthews Mortgage to Occident Federal Savings and Loan Association, Liber MLP 6694, Folio 72-73. BALTIMORE CITY SUPERIOR COURT (Land Records).

<sup>31</sup> December 20, 1945, John D Stewart and Horatio Matthews Deed to Federal Post # 19 American legion Inc. Liber MLP 6862, Folio 432, BALTIMORE CITY SUPERIOR COURT (Land Records).

<sup>32</sup> "Post History"